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ABSTRACT

Several groups of hearing-impaired students at Gallaudet College (District of Columbia) have successfully completed their student teaching assignment with hearing children in public schools. Factors leading to their success were analyzed through results of observation, interviews, and a survey questionnaire administered to samples of both hearing and hearing-impaired student teachers. Many success factors for hearing-impaired trainees resemble those leading to success for hearing trainees. Hearing impairments, however, provide these trainees with certain unique advantages. Through years of continuous use of, and dependence on, a visual mode of communication, the hearing-impaired teacher may be a superior visual attender in the classroom. The hearing-impaired teacher places high value on the act of communication. Strong identification with a sub-cultural base develops a clear sense of personal identity. The initial advantage of novelty and interest creates great pupil attentiveness which can be used to advantage. As a survivor of personal challenges, the hearing-impaired teacher is highly motivated. The hearing-impaired teacher, because of early negative school experiences, has a high sense of mission and, because program supervisors carry high expectations for their hearing-impaired teacher trainees, high levels of performance result. (Author/JD)

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THE HANDICAPPED PROFESSIONAL IN THE 21st CENTURY: FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

A Paper Delivered at the Annual Conference of

the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Professional certification in regular education has become a prerequisite in many states for certification in special education. For the hearing-impaired preprofessional, this prerequisite presents a special challenge. However, two groups of students at Gallaudet College have now successfully completed a special program in which they must carry out student teaching with hearing children in public schools. The factors leading to their success in this experience are analyzed through results of observations, interviews, and a survey questionnaire administered to samples of both hearing and hearing-impaired student teachers. Results indicate that many success factors for hearing-impaired trainees resemble those leading to success for hearing trainees; however, it was further concluded that their hearing impairment also provides these trainees with certain unique advantages in comparison with hearing trainees.

At first glance, the question posed in the title would seem either flippant or ridiculous: hearing impairment is perceived by most non-handicapped persons as a handicap of serious proportions. How, then, could hearing impairment be anything but a handicap to a professional teacher? In order to answer this question, let us examine a special teacher-training experience involving hearing-impaired teachers working with hearing children, and then discuss a related investigation with students in this training program.

Teacher Preparation Program

In 1980 Gallaudet College established an undergraduate teacher preparation program for hearing-impaired preprofessionals, leading to full certification in "regular" education in the District of Columbia Public Schools and the 27 other states in the Interstate Reciprocity Agreement for Teacher Certification. This certification is now a prerequisite for later specialized training and certification in deaf education in many states.

The unusual feature of this program is the full-time student teaching practicum experience which all students have during their final semester in regular public school classrooms. In this experience, the majority of trainees elect to use the services of a professional interpreter in the classroom, but only as a facilitator of communication and not as an "assistant teacher;" they work under the supervision of the regular classroom teacher or "Cooperating Teacher."

The disadvantages of being a hearing-impaired teacher with a class of hearing children are obvious, though in all cases surmountable:

1. The dependence on an interpreter for translation of each communication act at first adds to the complexity of classroom interaction; however, children and teachers alike adapt quickly to this form of transaction, and by the second week of the practicum, communication proceeds smoothly.
2. The difficulty for the hearing-impaired person in remaining aware of all the simultaneous conversations in some classrooms prevents him or her from gathering some of the procedural nuances as quickly as would a hearing person; again, however, the hearing-impaired teacher learns to continually watch the entire classroom and through the interpreter to sample each of the conversations in any activity in which several groups of children are working autonomously.
3. Classroom control presents a special challenge at first because of the difficulty of sensing when the classroom noise level is reaching an unacceptable level. Once again, however, the student teacher trains the interpreter in a useful cueing system to be used at such times, so that the student teacher can take responsibility for corrective action with children.

So much, then, for an overview of the potential problems in this practicum. Wherein does deafness perhaps give an advantage to a teacher in this setting?

The analysis of experiences with this program over a two-year period with two different groups of successful hearing-impaired student teachers forms the basis for answering this paradoxical question.

Success Factors in Student Teaching

Numerous studies have examined the relationships between specific factors and success in student teaching. Investigators, for example, have considered the relationship between student teaching success and such factors as: teacher demographic background, the effects of the social- emotional classroom climate as established by the teacher, the knowledge preparation of the teacher, the effects of particular instructional strategies (such as levels of questioning), beliefs of teachers, decision-making skills, and teacher personality characteristics. Although Tyler (1954) was not able successfully to predict teaching performance of student teachers from personality characteristics scores, later work has identified relationships between those characteristics and teaching performance (Ryans, 1960; Warburton, Butcher, & Forrest, 1963; Davis & Satterly, 1969). More recent work by Johnson (1983) and Hawn, Ellett, and Johnson (1977) has carried this work further forward in predicting success in teaching performance on the basis of personality factors. Other studies have examined the relationship between personality factors and performance on national tests such as the National Teachers Examination (NTE); students scoring high on social precision, control of their emotions and regard for social reputation were found to score high on the NTE (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970). In addition, students who were identified as

experimenting, critical, analytical and tolerant of change were the students with higher grade-point-averages (GPA) in professional teacher preparation programs (Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1970).

In regard to hearing-impaired persons, research has indicated that deaf persons have been found to have job expectations which are parallel to those of their hearing peers (Rosenstein & Lerman, 1963). Specific job skills were found to be less important than the college experience itself in helping hearing-impaired students to communicate and establish interpersonal relationships, on the job (Thompson & Lucas, 1981).

Pilot Study

A special pilot study by the author used preliminary interviews with supervisors to identify a combination of skills, background factors, and personality factors as potentially most applicable to the success of hearing-impaired teacher trainees who would be working with hearing children. These factors were then listed in the form of checklist items to be administered to groups of hearing and hearing-impaired student teachers. Based on the above-reported similarities of job expectations between hearing and hearing-impaired persons (Rosenstein & Lerman, 1963), the present study assumed that in spite of the obvious difference in their communication modalities, both hearing and hearing-impaired trainees preparing for credentials as teachers of hearing children should be asked to evaluate a similar set of potential success factors.

Procedure

The special checklist (see Table 1) was administered to two matched groups of successful student teachers: (1) Twelve Gallaudet College graduating senior education majors (all hearing-impaired) who had successfully completed student teaching in public school settings, and (2) ten University of Maryland education seniors (all hearing) who had also completed a successful student teaching practicum in public schools.[1] The University of Maryland students all had hearing within the normal range. The hearing loss of the Gallaudet students ranged from 60 to 130 dB loss, with a mean loss of 103 dB. The communication modalities of this group included two who functioned in the hearing world without an interpreter and had intelligible speech, two who required an interpreter for transliteration of what hearing persons say but who had intelligible speech, and eight who required an interpreter for both transliteration and voicing when communicating with hearing persons.

Subjects were asked to rank in order the five most important factors out of the listed fourteen which contributed to their success in student teaching. The results were tabulated, compared, and analyzed for differences. In addition, two college faculty supervisors observed each hearing-impaired subject weekly in the practicum classroom for eight weeks, in regard to success in these and other factors. Individual interviews were conducted with each of the hearing-impaired

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[1] The author would like to acknowledge the highly valuable cooperation of Dr. James Greenberg and Dr. Frank Lyman from the University of Maryland, and Dr. John Madison and Dr. Stephen Wolk of Gallaudet College.

Table 1

Undergraduate Student Teaching Questionnaire

Name: _____

Date: _____

Major: (Check one) ____ Early Childhood

____ Elementary

____ Secondary
Subject Field: _____

Year of student teaching: _____

You have successfully passed student teaching; please rank the items below which you predict will contribute most to your success. Put a "1" next to the most important item, a "2" next to the second most important item, etc., for your top five choices.

1.	Past experience as a student in school myself	____
2.	Ability to plan lessons	____
3.	Previous classroom observation experience	____
4.	Previous classroom aiding experience	____
5.	Other work with children	____
6.	Knowledge of curriculum	____
7.	Knowledge of methods	____
8.	Communication skills	____
9.	Ability to relate personally to others	____
10.	Use of a classroom interpreter	____
11.	Support of my family in my career choice	____
12.	My ability to "hear" with my eyes	____
13.	Children's fascination with my use of sign language	____
14.	Motivation to be a good teacher	____

Other (please specify and write a rank number for each):

15. _____ ____

16. _____ ____

What does this program offer you that is especially useful?

subjects and with their Cooperating Teachers to obtain elaboration on their responses.

Results

Chi Square tests were first carried out on each questionnaire item so as to test the significance of differences between observed and expected responses within both groups. (This statistic was selected because of the importance of examining individual item differences; the use of a non-parametric statistic such as the Wilcoxon rank test was rejected because the opportunity would be lost for looking at individual item differences.) It was found that all item responses differed significantly from chance expectation for both groups, thus indicating that the responses within groups departed consistently from randomness.

The responses of both groups were then compared item by item between groups. The results of the analysis of the questionnaire data between groups are presented below in Table 2. The frequencies for each item were converted to percentages within each group; percentages between groups were then contrasted using the Chi Square test for the difference between two independent samples. In addition, weights were assigned to each of the ranks (a rank of 1 was weighted 5, a rank of 2 was weighted 4, etc.); then the total weight for each item within groups was computed, followed by mean weight to allow further comparisons between groups. The comparison between groups revealed significant differences in only two items; the hearing-impaired students rated "past experience in school" as significantly more important, while the hearing - students rated "ability to relate personally to others" as significantly more important.

Table 2

Comparison of Self-Reported Success Factors by Hearing-Impaired versus Hearing Student Teachers

Item No.	Hearing-Impaired (N=12) Frequency	Percentage	Mean Rank Weight	Hearing (N=10) Frequency	Percentage	Mean Rank Weight	χ^2 test significance of % differences between groups
1	8	67%	4.6	2	28%	3.5	4.84 ($p < .05$)
2	8	67%	2.5	4	40%	1.8	NS
3	3	25%	2.0	5	50%	3.5	NS
4	5	41%	2.2	4	40%	2.5	NS
5	7	58%	3.2	3	30%	2.8	NS
6	4	33%	2.0	4	40%	2.2	NS
7	5	41%	2.9	4	40%	1.3	NS
8	6	50%	3.7	6	60%	2.9	NS
9	5	41%	3.8	9	90%	3.9	5.59 ($p < .02$)
10	3	8%	3.0				
11	2	16%	1.5	0	0%	0	NS
12	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	NS
13	0	0%	0				
14	7	58%	4.5	8	80%	4.8	NS

Discussion

Statistical analyses of these data are rendered difficult by the small sample sizes. However, the findings can be discussed for purposes of identifying initial base-line information upon which later investigation may build.

The two statistically significant differences (items 1 and 9) merit discussion first. The significantly lower value accorded by hearing subjects to prior experience as school pupils themselves (item 1) may be the result of their perceiving some of the other factors as more immediately relevant than their past experiences; although their prior experience as hearing pupils in hearing classrooms would appear more relevant to teaching hearing children than would a hearing-impaired person's experiences as a pupil, that experience as a pupil fades as a factor for hearing persons who are applying more immediate experiences on a daily basis. On the other hand, prior school experience may provide a kind of "anchor" for hearing-impaired trainees who are stepping into a new environment of hearing persons.

The clearly lower value accorded by hearing-impaired trainees to establishing interpersonal relationships (item 9) may relate to the initial barrier which they may sense between themselves and hearing children. Although interviews and observations indicate that this barrier dissipates rather rapidly as student teaching proceeds, nonetheless the hearing-impaired trainee compensates for this initial perceived barrier by concentrating more on establishing smooth communication in teaching transactions than on interpersonal relationships.

The apparent but statistically non-significant trends favoring one group or the other in other items must await further investigation with larger sample sizes to determine if these differences may in some cases prove to be significant after all. For the moment, however, the fact that four particular items (8, 10, 12, and 13) were rated low by hearing-impaired subjects may indeed constitute an important finding:

a. The lack of significant difference between groups on the communication skills item (item 8) replicates and confirms the results of an earlier study with different subjects (Martin, 1982), which showed that hearing-impaired student teachers successfully overcome the communication challenge of working with hearing children in a practicum setting.

b. The fact that hearing-impaired trainees did not highly rank the skill of being able to "hear" with their eyes (item 12) indicates that these trainees learn to use the interpreter appropriately as a communication link in the classroom setting.

c. The fact that hearing-impaired trainees did not check use of an interpreter (item 10) nor children's fascination with sign language (item 13) as success factors indicates that by the end of student teaching, success for them does not rely on the uniqueness of these trainees' communication modality as either a novelty or a critical variable.

Thus, the above list would indicate a "normalization" of the practicum setting for hearing-impaired trainees in regard to these particular factors--an essential point in supporting the continued

awarding of a regular education credential to the graduates of this program.

The present study focused primarily on the central tendencies of a group of successful student teachers on self-reported perceptions of those factors relating most closely to their success. Based on the findings of this study, these self-identified factors could now be used to devise an instrument to be used on a larger sample of students, to investigate whether scores on such an instrument indeed correlate significantly with supervisor-rated success on specific performance criteria after student teaching. Such an instrument, once validated, would then have an ultimate application as a potential criterion for decisions about accepting or rejecting student applicants for teacher preparation programs.

Conclusions

The many non-significant differences between the groups' responses to the success-factor list are indications that this practicum experience has been successfully normalized, and show that the hearing-impaired trainee has a strong preprofessional base upon which to build his/her future work as a teacher. That base, coupled with the projected "advantages" suggested below, provide an initial "head-start" for hearing-impaired teacher trainees in spite of the initial communication challenges which they must overcome.

Systematic observation and interviews with cooperating teachers led to additional insights in the interpretation of the apparent preprofessional successes of the hearing-impaired trainees. The following

additional explanations derive from these observations and interviews, and may also be viewed as additional hypotheses about advantages for the deaf teacher, upon which to build additional future empirical studies on this topic:

1. Although the questionnaire results do not indicate a self-perceived advantage for being able to hear "with one's eyes," interviews with Cooperating Teachers who have worked with both hearing and hearing-impaired trainees in hearing classrooms, indicate that this ability is noticeably superior in hearing-impaired trainees. Through years of continuous use of and dependence on a visual mode of communication (sign language), the hearing-impaired teacher may be a superior visual attender in comparison to a hearing person. This characteristic means that this person sees and takes in a tremendous amount of classroom data, processes it mentally, and then takes some appropriate expressive or responsive action. The hearing-impaired person must be sure with his/her eyes because no other input sense is available as a reliable channel.

2. The hearing-impaired teacher has usually struggled in his/her past to survive in the communication dimension of what is clearly a hearing world. This generalization clearly applies to the hearing-impaired trainees in this sample, all of whom use sign language on a daily basis and the majority of whom are profoundly deaf as described above under "Procedure." Thus, these subjects have learned to place a high value on the act of communication. We know that communication is at the heart of successful classroom transactions; thus, an adult who has learned to be unusually clear, unambiguous, and attentive to communication therefore has an initial advantage in the classroom setting where communication is critical. This point in no way diminishes the obvious success of the hearing trainees in establishing successful communication with children; however, communication is from the outset higher on the agenda of a hearing-impaired person because of the anxiety about working with hearing children. This heightened attention apparently works to the initial advantage of such a trainee as the experience begins.

3. Those hearing-impaired student teachers who have grown up in the "deaf community" have a strong identification with a sub-cultural base, which provides a clear personal identity on which to build their adult life. Although this effect may be indirect in relation to classroom behavior, a young adult who has such a clear sense of identity can concentrate more energy on the preprofessional effort. The only hearing persons with a similar sociological advantage would be those who had grown up in some other cohesive minority group culture.

4. The hearing-impaired student teacher entering a class of hearing children for the first time may have a temporary but useful advantage of newness, youth, and novelty. His or her use of, and dependence on, a visual language system, is a source of both curiosity and interest to hearing children. The astute student teacher is quick to exploit this advantage of greater pupil attentiveness before it "wears off" as it always does. The hearing student teacher on the other hand, usually has only the "novelty" of newness and youth.

5. To be hearing-impaired or "handicapped" in any way can unquestionably be devastating on a personal level for some persons. Those who have acquired and nurtured a determination to overcome that obstacle on the way to becoming a professional are as a group unusually highly motivated to persist in their preparation. This highly noticeable determination proves invaluable in surviving and learning from all of the normal daily "crises" of student teaching. Thus, this advantage resides in being an excellent survivor of classroom challenges.

6. Many of the hearing-impaired teachers had negative school experiences when they were children themselves due to poor recognition of, and provision for, their special needs as learners. Thus, part of their motivation to become teachers may be based on a specific sense of mission to undo the wrongs of the educational past and improve the opportunities for children when they teach. A hearing person often does not have such a strong sense of mission which is based on past personal frustrations. A by-product of these trainees' work with hearing children may well be that when they become teachers of deaf children, they will have higher expectations of these children than many current teachers have, because these deaf trainees have now experienced children who are functioning at a higher level than they had thought possible for any children to do.

7. The very fact of the unusual nature of this practicum experience means that the program supervisors are consistently maintaining not only close watchfulness but also high expectations of the hearing-impaired trainee. The demonstrably positive effects of high expectations in leading to high levels of performance is well documented by the prior work of Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968).

None of the above-listed seven advantages is intended to imply that student teaching is easy or unchallenging for the hearing-impaired teacher in a class of hearing children: it is indeed challenging. However, we may now safely conclude that the exciting success of these

highly motivated young adults is not only exemplary but also explainable in some objective fashion. The world of some hearing children is now richer for their opportunity to work with such teachers.

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